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ABSTRACT

This report presents information from a conference of leaders from districts and states that have been implementing policies to end social promotion. Discussions examined: goals for ending social promotion; promising intervention strategies (using comprehensive accountability systems, using multiple measures to determine grade placement, offering extended learning time for at-risk students, restructuring school days to provide in-class support, and offering professional support to teachers and principals); major challenges (finding time and resources to provide teachers with necessary professional development opportunities and building public support for higher standards); and general principles and experiences that should influence future practices and policies (e.g., the idea that if the money is not available to put support systems in place, do not talk about accountability, and policies that increase student accountability can also have profound effects on teachers). The vision of school improvement held by teachers, administrators, and political leaders must be comprehensive. No such policy can be implemented without providing additional educational opportunities for students. Multiple student assessment measures must be used. Support for such policies must be developed by explaining to parents and teachers that greater rigor will be expected of students, but safeguards are in place for handling problems that occur. (SM)

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Ending Social Promotion: Early Lessons Learned

A Report on Early Lessons Learned in the Efforts to End Social Promotion in the Nation's Public Schools

October 2000

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education

Council of the Great City Schools

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in the Nation's Public Schools

U.S. Department of Education

and

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Ending Social Promotion: Early Lessons Learned

Foreword

Ending social promotion makes sense--why should a child be passed on to the next grade in school if she or he has not learned enough to earn that promotion? Several years ago, the Chicago Public Schools instituted such a policy to end social promotion, as the city's leaders brought greater academic rigor to public education in that city. Several other large cities have followed with their own policies, and now several state governments have enacted state-wide policies requiring retention in grade if a student has not mastered the academic subject matter. Last year, President Clinton called for a national policy to end social promotion.

The findings of research on what happens when students are held back in grade and not promoted present a major road black to ending social promotion. Retained students often do not do well in school and are more likely later on to drop out of school. Children from racial and ethnic minority groups, especially boys of African-American descent, are the ones who most commonly show these ill effects of being retained in grade.

How can a policy which makes sense be reconciled with the bad effects of carrying it out? On the one hand, how can anyone be in favor of promoting a student if he or she has not learned? On the other hand, how can leaders advocate a policy of ending social promotion which will result in many children, especially minorities, dropping out of school?

To help answer these questions, the U.S. Department of Education and the Council of Great City Schools convened, on May 16, 2000 in Washington, D. C., a conference of leaders from school districts and states which have been implementing policies to end social promotion. Many of the largest cities in the country were represented because they have been in the forefront of this movement. I served as the chair, or moderator, of that group.

The discussion at this meeting was meant to assist these leaders in understanding what others were doing to have positive effects from instituting greater academic rigor in their schools and to avoid the ill effects of ending social promotion. The conference was also meant to help federal officials better understand what was happening around the country as school districts ended social promotion. By issuing this short summary of the proceedings we hope that the general public will also gain greater understanding of the issue.

Jack Jennings, Director
Center on Education Policy
Washington, D. C.

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Ending Social Promotion: Early Lessons Learned

Introduction

This report summarizes the proceedings of a meeting convened jointly by the U.S. Department of Education's (ED) Office of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Council the of Great City Schools to discuss the early lessons learned from recent efforts to end social promotion in public schools. The purposes of the meeting were to:

- Give local and state education leaders engaged in ending social promotion the opportunity to share their experiences and learn from one another.
- Inform ED staff about the lessons learned from efforts to end social promotion.
- Offer advice to ED staff about how they can help current and future efforts to end social promotion.

Participants at the one-day meeting, which was held on May 16, 2000, in Washington, D.C., included representatives from state and local education agencies that have adopted policies designed to end the practice of promoting to the next grade students who have not achieved minimum proficiency for their grade level. Also in attendance were researchers who have studied efforts to raise standards in public schools and representatives of national teacher unions. A complete list of participants is attached in the appendix.

Discussion during the meeting revolved around four questions. This report highlights the major themes and conclusions that emerged during the discussion of each question.

Question 1: What are the goals in ending social promotion practices?

Participants indicated that in most cases, their states and districts adopted policies designed to end social promotion as part of a broader strategy to raise academic standards and student achievement in public schools. They stressed that their policies to end social promotion are not, and should not be seen as, operating in isolation from other important reforms occurring in their jurisdictions. For instance, two participants said that both of their school districts decided to end social promotion as part of an overall strategy to institute higher academic standards and to give teachers various tools to help their students reach the standards. One educator continued, "Ending social promotion is a part of comprehensive reform." The implications of such policies are far-reaching and complicated and "require changing the entire system. . . .[Ending social promotion] presents a bunch of issues to deal with. This is the crux of education reform," commented another individual.

Forum participants agreed that ending social promotion requires an accountability and support system that ensures that students will have adequate opportunities to achieve at higher levels. As one participant pointed out, "Ending social promotion is not just a matter of putting standards in place and seeing who can jump over the bar. You have to give students more opportunities to learn." Another educator indicated that ending social promotion in another urban district is one of several accountability measures designed to give meaning to the district's new academic standards. "Locally, our effort is

to force the questions 'What kinds of supports are necessary? What kinds of investments do we need to make?' Adult accountability is a murkier issue . . . [but] we must do something before high-stakes tests kick in." There was widespread agreement during the meeting that one important reason for raising standards and expectations and ending social promotion is that students will respond with improved performance. "Kids can do more," concluded a superintendent. "[In the past], we just lowered the bar and expectations for them, and what we've seen are the results of that. When we raise standards and provide the supports, we start to see much better work."

Participants reported that the impetus for adopting policies to end social promotion has come from different sources. In most of the jurisdictions represented at the meeting, the primary impetus came from school system leaders who recognized that, as one participant said, "What we were doing was not working." This view was echoed by another person, who added that in their school district as in the rest of the country, "A lot of what we have been doing has not been working, whether it's retention or social promotion. We have to come up with a new model....There's a whole gamut of issues we need to address," such as extended learning time for some students and professional development for teachers.

In some districts, the business community has played a pivotal role encouraging school systems to raise standards for students. A participant related that their school district was "hearing from the business community that the pool of applicants for high-tech jobs and even [for] lower-skill jobs did not have adequate skills to meet their needs. . . .We were getting constant feedback from the business community that we are not cutting it."

At least two states adopted policies ending social promotion largely for political—not educational—reasons, according to two forum participants. In one state, "[The governor] saw this as a way to slap the public schools and show how badly they were doing," one educator commented. Since then, however, that State Department of Education has been trying to put in place the supports needed to make the policy a positive instrument that schools can use to improve student achievement. The State Department of Education is developing a high school exit exam, and the legislature has approved funding for intervention programs for students at risk of being retained or failing to graduate. The individual added, "The sequence has been all wrong. . . .If all these pieces had been in place in the beginning, [ending social promotion] would have been the right thing to do." Another participant described a State Board of Education's new policy ending social promotion as "a knee-jerk response to the national trends. It was a political idea. They thought, 'If [the school district] is going to be tough and strong and mean, we're going to be tough and strong and mean.' It's not part of an intelligent plan to improve schools in [the state]."

Question 2: What intervention strategies offer the most promise of success?

As identified by meeting participants, promising strategies for eliminating social promotion fell into five major categories:

- Instituting policies to end social promotion as part of a comprehensive strategy to increase school and teacher accountability.
- Using multiple measures of achievement to determine whether a student should be

promoted or retained.

- Providing extended learning opportunities for students at risk of being retained.
- Restructuring the school day to provide more in-class support for students at risk of being retained.
- Providing more professional support and assistance to teachers and principals.

Comprehensive accountability systems. Several respondents stressed that their districts' decision to end social promotion came as part of a desire to increase accountability throughout the school system. Such an integrated approach to accountability ensures that districts do not raise standards on the backs of children alone. As one participant said, "Ending social promotion was one of the last things [Chicago] did in terms of accountability. First we had to work on teacher accountability, principal accountability, and central office accountability. You can't make students accountable unless your teachers and principals understand what it means to be accountable. It prevents opportunity-to-learn problems. You have to have the other parts in place first." In Chicago, for instance, low-performing schools are placed on probation, which gives them access to extra assistance from central office staff as well as to external partners and managers. If a pattern of failure persists, the school may be reconstituted.

Before adopting student promotion criteria, the St. Paul, Minnesota district put in place a school accountability plan that rates schools based on their performance on the Metropolitan Achievement Test-Seventh Edition (MAT-7). Schools in the bottom category must develop a Corrective Action Plan, receive guidance and support from the district's new School Intervention Unit, and implement one of several research-based comprehensive school reform models. These schools are also subject to reconstitution if they do not improve. Philadelphia establishes two-year performance targets for individual schools according to their baseline performance on the Stanford Achievement Test-Ninth Edition (SAT-9) and on other measures. Principals and senior central office staff also face increased accountability and their salary increases are determined by their school's and the district's performance. According to several participants, the implementation of comprehensive accountability systems that include an end to social promotion has prompted entire school communities to assume shared responsibility for ensuring that every child succeeds.

Using multiple measures to determine grade placement. Most of the jurisdictions represented at the meeting employ multiple indicators of student performance to determine whether an individual student should be retained or promoted. Their use of multiple measures guards against any single indicator having too much weight and adversely affecting a child's education. As a further safeguard, several of the districts and states have instituted review processes that allow parents or teachers to challenge a school's decision to retain a particular student. In the Houston Independent School District, students in grades 1-3 have to satisfy three standards based on teachers' grades, the SAT-9, and either the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (grade 3) or a word recognition test (grades 1 and 2). Moreover, each school has a grade placement committee composed of teachers and chaired by the principal that reviews each student's performance and makes all final decisions regarding promo-

tion and retention. If a committee believes, based on alternative evidence, that a child who has not met the criteria should nonetheless be promoted, it has the discretion to approve the promotion. According to a district representative, "We don't intend for these committees to circumvent the policy", but rather to provide an external check that lets teachers and principals make the final decisions about retention and promotion based on their professional knowledge about the student's capabilities. North Carolina's student accountability standards also include an appeal process for parents or teachers to challenge a child's retention.

Other districts also reported using multiple measures to determine which students require intervention and/or retention. Most notably, the San Diego Unified School District is not using results from the SAT-9, which the state has adopted as its primary student assessment, to make decisions about student retention and promotion. Instead, to guard against the narrowing of the curriculum brought about by teaching to the test, the district uses a variety of diagnostic literacy assessments to identify students for intervention strategies and possible retention, including the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), Stanford Diagnostic Test, and a separate test for English language learners. To date, the district has established only literacy standards for promotion, but its new math director will begin developing math criteria. The district also has an attendance standard that students must meet to advance to the next grade. St. Paul has established multiple criteria for promotion based on teachers' analyses of student work, results from the MAT-7 and the state's new assessment test, and student attendance. In Boston, which also administers literacy diagnostic tests, it was reported that the use of these diagnostic instruments, combined with policies to end social promotion, "has changed entirely the nature of teachers' work. Their conversations now are about individual students."

Extended learning time for students at risk. Perhaps the most common strategy discussed during the meeting was the provision of additional instructional time for students who do not or may not meet new promotion standards. The purpose of these programs is to give students who might otherwise be retained more instructional time to master the content they need to move to the next grade. However, districts varied significantly in their approach to extended learning time. For instance, some districts offered after-school programs, others focused on summer programs, and some offered both. Student eligibility also differed across districts, with some districts mandating extended learning time for students at risk of being retained, while others are making it voluntary. Overall, district representatives reported that these programs have improved student achievement and reduced retention rates in their districts.

Hillsborough County reflects the diversity of approaches to extended learning time. It initially offered after-school tutoring by certified teachers to all students in low-performing schools. After Florida enacted a new school accountability plan, it made funding available for after-school tutoring in all schools. Students who have been suspended, have low attendance, or perform poorly on the state assessment or college entrance exams are eligible for the tutoring services. Through its participation in Equity 2000, a College Board program, the district sponsors Saturday Academies that offer supplemental assistance in math. For the last

four years the district also has mandated summer school for low-achieving students. According to a county representative, this array of services has resulted in fewer students being retained and in higher scores on the state exam, the SAT-9, and the district's own benchmark tests that are used to ensure that students meet district content standards. Funding for these efforts comes from the state, Title I, and Equity 2000.

Chicago's Summer Bridge program is one of the best known extended learning programs for students who would otherwise be retained. According to one forum participant the district has worked hard to convey the message that "summer school is not a punishment, it is a gift. It is our attempt to have year-round instruction." Citing the diversity of summer school programs that Chicago offers for gifted and talented students and other diverse populations, the participant added, "It's not for [behaviorally or academically challenged] kids. There are different types of summer school, and more than 50 percent of elementary students attend in some form." Students in grades 3, 6, and 8 who exceed the maximum number of absences or who do not meet a cut-off score on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) must attend Summer Bridge for six weeks. There, they complete a highly scripted curriculum that targets the skills that elicit the lowest scores on the ITBS. At the end of the six-week period, students retake the ITBS. Based on their performance on the test, the summer school teacher and principal can recommend them for promotion or retention.

Other districts reported variations of extended learning time for at-risk students. In Houston, classroom teachers complete a cumulative learning profile for every student who is expected to attend summer school. The profiles identify specific skills that the student needs to work on during the four-week summer program. The district provides a detailed curriculum, but does not require that teachers use it. The District of Columbia Public Schools mandates that students in grades 1-8 who score below a certain level on the SAT-9 attend its five-or six-week Summer Stars program (the longer program is for special education students), and strongly recommends Summer Stars for students slightly above that level. In the 2000-2001 school year it will extend the Summer Stars program to the ninth grade. For the first time, the district will use the Voyager curriculum in all of its summer school classes. The district also has a Saturday Stars program that uses the Voyager curriculum to provide ongoing supplemental assistance to students.

Restructuring the school day to provide in-class support. Several districts, while also offering extended learning opportunities, have invested heavily in restructuring school schedules to provide additional or alternative learning opportunities for students who could be retained. A key ingredient of their approach has been early identification of at-risk students. Rather than waiting until students fail to meet promotion criteria, thus becoming eligible for remedial services, these districts have established procedures to identify as early as possible those students who might not meet promotion criteria. They then assign those students to intervention programs designed to help them move into the next grade.

San Diego and Boston have led the way in this regard. After San Diego developed its literacy framework and began using diagnostic tests to identify students at risk of be-

ing retained, it instituted a series of interventions for these students. First, it assigns students deemed at risk to at least two consecutive periods of literacy instruction; students at very high risk are assigned to three or four consecutive periods. Using state funds designated for class size reduction, it offers reduced student-teacher ratios in these intensive classes that help students meet the district's promotion criteria. "Intervention takes up two-thirds of the day for some students, and that will bear fruit because it comes early," said one participant. Similar interventions for math are currently under development.

Although Boston makes critical promotion decisions after grades 3, 6, and 9, its approach begins as soon as students complete grades 2, 5, and 8. Elementary school students identified as being at risk of failing to meet the promotion criteria after the following grade are assigned to a two-hour literacy block and an 80-minute math block during the school day. High school students attend 90-minute blocks in both subject areas. Schools select from among five literacy programs to use during the literacy blocks, including two that were developed within the district. With funding largely from the Annenberg Challenge and matching dollars (and administered by the Boston Plan for Excellence in collaboration with the Boston Public Schools), each school has its own literacy and math specialists, who spend two-thirds of their time providing direct assistance to students during the school day.

Other districts established alternative learning environments for students at risk of being retained. In California, where each district must develop its own intervention plan, one district developed special middle school academies for students whose performance put them at risk of failing to be promoted to high school. According to a participant, the district found that students thrived in these special academies, which maintained class sizes of no more than 10 students, but they often struggled when they were promoted into larger, more impersonal, comprehensive high schools. In Chicago, eighth graders who do not meet the criteria for promotion to high school, even after completing Summer Bridge, do not repeat the eighth grade. Instead, they enter one of nine Transition Centers, which maintain significantly reduced class sizes of 15 students. Halfway through the next school year, these students retake the ITBS to see if they can exit the Transition Centers and rejoin their peers in high school.

Professional support for teachers and principals. There was widespread agreement during the meeting that greater student, teacher, and school accountability will have only limited results if there is not a parallel investment in improving instruction and leadership through professional development and training. An individual captured the sense of the meeting by stating, "None of this works without professional development." Teachers need to be equipped to work with all types of children, including low-performing students. Existing practices, including instructional strategies currently used in classrooms, have not been working for the vast numbers of students who are failing to meet promotion criteria. Ending social promotion, as an individual pointed out, motivates students to work harder and plan ahead. However, as others stressed, enhanced motivation by students must be met by increased professional capacity by teachers.

Virtually all of the districts represented at the meeting have made additional investments in professional development in conjunction with their policies to end social promotion. Boston has allocated $30 million—4.5 percent of its budget—to professional development, including content area specialists for teachers and principals. Content area specialists spend one or two days a week as coaches in each school working with teachers to improve their teaching. The same literacy and math specialists who spend two-thirds of their time working with students spend the remainder of their time with teachers conducting demonstration lessons and other activities designed to improve teaching. They also guide conversations among teachers and principals who get together to analyze student work. A district representative explained, "We have lots of networking and cross-school fertilization. The teachers are less isolated....The coaches help principals have rich conversations about problems and interventions." To attract top candidates, the district pays 15-percent bonuses to these candidates. Moreover, principals and assistant principals each receive six or seven days worth of training on appropriate methods to observe and coach teachers.

The St. Paul, Minnesota school district, has invested heavily in retraining reading teachers in grades K-3. It, too, has recruited its best reading teachers to serve as a training cadre. Because the state assessment will include a writing assessment next year, the district is taking a similar approach to training teachers to teach students to write clearly. Another focus of its efforts has been recasting parent-teacher conferences as forums for examining student work. To give teachers examples of effective parent conferences, the district distributed videotapes of productive and successful conferences. Finally, because the district has a high proportion of students with limited proficiency in English, the district has provided training to bilingual and classroom teachers on team teaching to address these students' learning needs within the regular classroom.

Other districts have upgraded professional development, too. Over the next three years Los Angeles is hiring school-based reading coaches for each of its schools to work with teachers to improve reading instruction. It also has invested in coaching for principals on supervising teachers and improving instruction in their schools. San Diego has seven district-based instructional leaders who train principals to be instructional leaders in their schools. It also is looking into merging its summer school program with summer training for teachers so that teachers can use summer school classrooms to practice their new strategies. Houston is training all K-8 teachers in a balanced approach to teaching reading and placing reading trainers in every school. It also is helping principals understand how to analyze student work.

Question 3: What are the major challenges?

As an integral component of efforts to raise academic standards and improve student achievement, ending social promotion presents many challenges to educators, according to meeting participants. The two most prominent challenges identified during their discussions were: (1) finding the time and resources to provide teachers with the professional development opportunities they need; and (2) building public support for higher standards, especially because of the

equity concerns associated with raising academic standards and holding students accountable. Additional challenges include upgrading facilities so that they can accommodate extended time and alternative learning activities, developing intervention strategies for the most at-risk students (especially high school students), and preparing and recruiting better teachers. Several participants also discussed the challenge of implementing long-term accountability systems (including student accountability) in unstable political climates that often demand short-term solutions.

Opportunities for teacher professional development. Raising academic standards typically requires teachers to learn, in some depth, new knowledge and skills that improve their ability to help their students meet the new standards. To analyze student work and to point out students' strengths and weaknesses to other teachers (e.g., summer school teachers), teachers must become more knowledgeable about student assessment. New content standards adopted by many of the states and districts represented at the meeting often require teachers to learn and teach new content. To assist students who do not achieve content mastery with traditional instructional strategies, teachers may need to learn varied instructional strategies. As a forum participant noted, teachers or principals assigned to coach their peers (a strategy used by many of the districts represented at the meeting) must first receive extensive training on effective strategies for coaching, or their efforts are likely to be wasted.

Accountability systems give teachers an incentive to pursue new learning opportunities, but the amount of time available for those activities is limited. Teachers' contracts require only a minimal number of hours of professional development each year (15 hours in the District of Columbia, 20 hours in Philadelphia, three days in Los Angeles, and about four days in Boston), and districts often lack funds to pay for large numbers of teachers to attend extended professional development sessions during the summer. Finding time after school is problematic: "[Teachers] don't want to work another four hours after a full day," another participant commented. It was added that some of the best teachers in California, for example, use their own time to serve as consultants to other schools or districts, making them unavailable to serve as coaches or mentors.

Additional paperwork associated with accountability systems makes the lack of time even more acute. For instance, St. Paul requires teachers to develop growth plans for every student in their classroom. To help summer school teachers know what to teach, Houston requires classroom teachers to complete cumulative learning profiles for every student expected to attend summer school. Fostering effective communication among teachers who work with the same students depends largely on the amount of time teachers have to develop detailed reports on each child and to study what other teachers say about their students. In most cases, an individual added, districts or schools do not designate time during which teachers can complete or review this type of paperwork.

Equity issues and community support. Concern about the underlying equity issues stemming from efforts to end social promotion emerged regularly during the meeting. Because of the persistent achievement gap between white students and students of color, the latter are likely to be dispropor-

tionately affected by efforts to raise standards and hold students accountable. Several participants mentioned that students of all races who are not proficient in English and do not have full access to the core curriculum also may be retained in disproportionately high numbers when social promotion is not allowed. One forum attendee highlighted the disparity in resources between urban districts and their surrounding suburban districts, which accounts for some of the achievement gap. This participant further stressed, "We need to deal with issues of equity and social justice." Another educator concurred, saying that, after speaking with district leaders from the southern part of their state, it was concluded, "We are in serious trouble when it comes to [providing adequate resources that give students equal] opportunities to learn."

Unfortunately, bringing the achievement and resource gaps to the public's attention has not generated significant public pressure for greater funding equity. One participant noted that, while some policymakers look at the achievement gap as a challenge to improve the academic achievement of students of color, others view it as evidence that some students simply cannot achieve high standards. "Just looking at the data does not guarantee that we will have the appropriate policy response," she said. In Philadelphia, despite one recent Superintendent's successful engagement of community organizers, communities of faith, parents, and corporate leaders in support of fair funding for the city, the state has not yet addressed funding disparities between the city and its surrounding districts. One individual said that a lack of adequate funding may force Philadelphia to postpone its new retention policy because it cannot afford to provide the necessary support to students at risk of being retained. Another participant added, "Philadelphia is a good example of the convergence of the issues of resources and social promotion. The lack of resources affects the district's ability to implement high stakes accountability because it can't provide the support it needs to."

Given the equity issues associated with ending social promotion, one educator stressed that districts seeking to implement such policies "need community and parent buy-in, especially in the minority community. They already feel that these policies target their kids, and they fear that their kids will be left behind." Another forum participant offered a strategy for securing the support of the minority community for ending social promotion. When North Carolina was considering adopting statewide student accountability standards, leaders of the African American community objected. In conversations with them, state officials learned not to talk about ending social promotion. "It sounds like a punishment [to them]," the participant explained. "We don't do that anymore. Now we use language about helping to prepare students so we don't have to retain them." Thus, in presentations across the state, education leaders say that one of the outcomes of the student accountability standards will be "elimination of *the need for* social promotion," which has broader support among African American leaders because that approach implies greater support for students at risk of grade retention.

Other challenges. Two school district officials cited inadequate facilities as a barrier to their efforts. According to one district representative, his school district has not been able to consider developing alternative schools for students who have been retained (as are used in Chicago), because cur-

rent facilities in that district are already overcrowded, leaving no room for alternative programs. In Chicago, "most of the buildings are filled so [class size can't be lowered] to 18, and we can't have summer school in some buildings because they don't have air conditioning," a participant explained.

Some participants cited regulations associated with federal and state funds as restricting opportunities to address social promotion. Specifically, they wanted greater flexibility to use funds from Titles I and VI, IDEA, and CSRD. A U.S. Department of Education representative pointed to instances where districts, such as San Diego, have used federal monies in creative ways and suggested that ED could help clarify misconceptions about funding restrictions.

Another challenge has been the lack of a strategy to address the needs of students who, despite extensive support, continually fail to meet promotion criteria. In Chicago, these students make up about 10 percent of the total student population. "What do we do with these 10 percent?" a district official asked. "These are the ones who are in foster homes, who have gaps in their records, who have poor attendance." Other participants described high school students who cannot read: Early intervention was not enough, and remediation has not worked. "No matter what we do, some kids get too old to be in elementary school," commented another individual. "At some point they get too old to be in middle school. We have kids in ninth grade who have been retained two or three times."

Several participants attributed poor student achievement in part to issues related to the supply and preparation of teachers. A forum participant pointed out that Los Angeles has 6,000 teachers with emergency credentials because it can't find enough certified teachers for every classroom. Another individual indicated that California needs to address the issue of low teacher salaries throughout the state, as part of the answer to the problem of teacher recruitment. Several participants criticized teacher education programs for not adequately preparing teachers. One person suggested, "We need to look at higher education and how we prepare teachers and principals . . . and change that. There are some changes in some spots and you can tell the difference. School-to-work gave us a model [for teacher preparation], but we didn't heed it."

Finally, participants identified the political climate as a barrier to meaningful efforts to raise academic standards. Several participants referred to changes in public perception about retention and social promotion, and worried that there might be a backlash against policies to end social promotion. Such a backlash may already be occurring in Illinois, where an individual recounted that during forums to discuss the state's new policy, district superintendents complained that they had not been consulted before the policy was adopted and that they had not been given sufficient resources to provide the needed interventions. One district representative pointed to constant turnover in district leadership as a problem: "We put policies and procedures in place . . . but then things change because of shifting leadership in urban districts. We haven't allowed teachers to process any one thing long enough to make a difference in the classroom. We have multiple reform initiatives going on [at the same time] and that convolutes efforts to change practices." Another

participant added, "School districts' infrastructures [are] not designed well [and] get in the way. Schools need much more coherent support than they get from their districts."

Question 4: What general principles and experiences should influence future practices and policies?

The facilitator began the discussion of this question by summarizing one of the key points to emerge from the day's deliberations: "You can't look at social promotion as a single, isolated activity." With the right supportive policies in place, he added, ending social promotion can be a valuable tool because it captures the public's attention, gives meaning to high academic standards, and forces schools to be concerned about the performance of all of their students. One participant added, "If you are going to take this route, it is expensive. If you don't have the money to put the support systems in place, don't even talk about accountability."

Another individual stressed that policies that increase student accountability can have profound effects on teachers. "This is as much a task about adult learning as it is about student learning," she said. "Teachers have not been prepared to teach classes with 25 students of mixed abilities. There is a need for intensive work with teachers. The job's not going to get done if [we] don't do that. No matter how much you humiliate them and publish test results in the newspaper, they can't do it [without professional support]."

An educational researcher closed the discussion by pointing out that policies that end social promotion have profound systemic effects, not just effects on individual students. "They are operating on a culture of a whole school district. If you only look at the effects on children who are retained, you won't get the whole story."

Conclusion

Anyone who believes that school improvement is easy has never tried it, or listened to those who have. The discussion of ending social promotion summarized here shows how complex that task is, but it also can serve as a guide to educators and others who are thinking of setting as a goal the ending of social promotion. These are the major points which came from this discussion.

First, the vision of school improvement held by teachers, administrators, and political leaders must be comprehensive. Ending social promotion cannot be the only objective. If the school district wants to implement a policy which will have such serious consequences for children, the district must have an overall plan to raise academic standards, including demanding more accountability of schools, teachers, and administrators.

Second, no such policy can be implemented without providing additional educational opportunities for children, such as extended day or year services or intensive assistance during the day. Neither can such a policy be implemented without quality professional development being made available to teachers, who can then teach more demanding subject matter to children.

Third, multiple measures of assessing students' progress ought to be used, and these assessments should occur early and often so that problems are detected and then addressed as a student advances through school.

Fourth, support for such policies needs to be developed by explaining to parents and teachers that greater rigor will be expected of students but that safeguards are in place such as early detection of student academic problems and extra assistance to deal with problems when they occur. Assurances should also be given that teachers will have opportunities for professional development to upgrade their skills.

School districts implementing policies to end social promotion also will face practical problems of finding the space to provide extra services to children and the financial resources to pay for those services, as well as the professional development which will have to be provided to teachers. If additional dollars are not provided for this purpose, then other activities in school districts and schools will have to be curtailed or terminated.

Ending social promotion makes common sense, but only if it is carried out thoughtfully and well. Political, business, and education leaders have called for this policy because they see that what schools are now doing is not working to provide the greatest opportunities for all students. But, these leaders must have the will to put in place the essential elements needed to implement these policies so they work to help individual students and do not lead to the ill effects that research shows are possible.

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APPENDIX:

Meeting Participants

Meeting Participants

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